

J. O. AYANDA AND A. A. TAFIDA
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR FRESHWATER FISHERIES RESEARCH,
P. M. B. 6006 NEW BUSSA, NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

Abstract

The Nigerian economic development process has suffered from dearth of holistic approaches and misprioritization of programmes and projects, which lead to the realization of partial and unsustainable growth of other important sectors and sub sectors of the economy with potentials for economic emancipation. The contributions of fisheries to the economic growth in terms of food security, employment, income and GDP have not been well recognized. The sector has been ignored for long prior to the recent NEPAD summit (which implementation is yet to take proper shape). Fisheries are still undeveloped and fisher folks are today amongst the poorest in the country. The present paper sets in to review the Nigerian economic situation, the role of fisheries in the economy, issues, challenges and opportunities with the view to fostering growth of the sub-sector and national economic development.

Introduction

National economic growth can only be attained if all sectors and sub- sectors of the economy are considered as integral part of the overall process. Over the years Nigerian economic development process has suffered from dearth of holistic measures and misprioritization of programmes. This has resulted in partial and unsustainable growth of the economy as a whole. Fisheries, amongst other sectors, suffered the neglect most. This is in spite of its immense potentials and contributions to the socio- economic well -being of million of Nigerians, particularly in terms of food security, source of income and employment opportunities. However, fisheries have continued to stagnate without any remarkable growth and transformation. About 50% of fish supply in the country is still by importation (FDF, 2002).

The poor performance of the sector can be attributed to lack of proper policy implementation geared towards increased production and enhancement of economic gain. By implication this leads to poor resource management and sustainability. It is glaring today that the major threat of fishers in Nigeria remains the depletion of the resources and vulnerability. This is as a result to overexploitation coupled with other ecological/ environmental factors and seasonalities, among others.

The challenge therefore remains how Nigeria can translate its fisheries potentials to a positive economic development. It is against these background that the paper sets out to discuss the issues, challenges and roles of inland fisheries in Nigerian economy.

Nigerian Economy

Nigerian economy, traditionally based on agriculture and trade, changed profoundly in the late 19th century (The Nigerian Embassy Moscow, 2002). Before the discovery of oil, agriculture including fisheries was the mainstay of the economy contributing 65% of the GDP and 70% of the country's total exports (Mapzones, 2000). The main thrust of government policy at that time was to maximize the benefits of export -led development strategy. Export commodities were raw materials from agriculture and minerals. Industrial sector was still infant, the government adopted import substitution/ industrialization strategy which led to local production of various items. Remarkable achievements were made through that measure, particularly in terms of job creation and local production.

The discovery of oil in large quantities in the mid 60's adversely affected the agriculture sector. The share of agriculture in the GDP which stood for at 48.23% in 1971 further declined to 21% by 1977. Agricultural exports as a percentage of total exports, which was 20.7% in 1971 fell to 5.71% in 1977 (Oseni, 2001). Thus, the economy became heavily dependent on oil. Oil revenues represented almost 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and about 85% of total exports. The development created a structural problem to the economy with agricultural sector as the most affected. This eventually led to rural-urban drift. From 1974 Nigeria started importing foods.

Between 1978-1986, the country witnessed negative growth rates, which led to the introduction of a comprehensive reform package in 1986, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Objectively the programme was to diversify the productive base of the economy in order to reduce dependence on the oil sector. These reforms had no appreciable possible impact the economy. From 1995-1999 series of other reforms took place. Yet, World Bank studies in 1996 classified Nigeria as poor and characterized the economy as rural. The present Nigerian economic policy is that the economy would be private sector driven, and public firms have been either commercialized or privatized.

Inland Waters and Fisheries Resources

Nigeria is a country rich with natural and mineral resources which if properly harnessed can enable the country to develop economically. FDF report (2002) indicates the existence of 853 km coastline and 210, 900 km² Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), given the total area of the country's entire maritime waters including the EEZ as 257, 200 km². Apart from being a maritime country, about two thirds of Nigeria lies in the watershed of the Niger River, which empties into Atlantic at the Niger Delta, and its major tributaries: Benue, Kaduna, Sokoto and Anambra (Stock, 2005). The extensive network of rivers, inland waters, lakes, and lagoons is estimated at more than 15 million hectares (Eyo, 2003). Earth Trends (2003) estimated about 260 freshwater fish species.

Inland fisheries production is mainly artisanal, aquaculture production is still quite small. Freshwater aquaculture production is estimated for selected years: by Earth Trends (2003) as: 5,703 metric tons (1987) and 17,663 metric tons (1997).

In the same vein, FAO (1998) estimated the nominal catches of Nigerian inland waters as below (Fig 1).

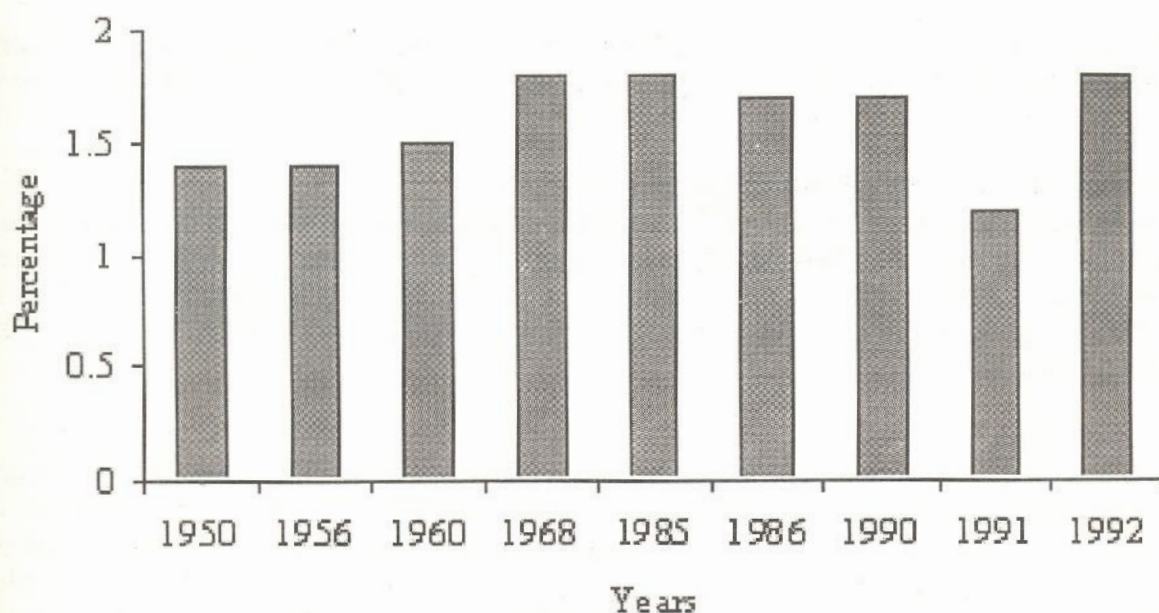


Figure 2: Contribution of fisheries to GDP
(Sources CBN, 1994)

Role of Fisheries in Nigerian Economy

In Africa, Asia, and Latin America the fisheries of inland lakes, rivers and other freshwater ecosystems provide an important sources of food and income, and for many these are the principal source of protein (Dugan, 2002). In Africa for instance, fish and fishery products have an annual export value of US \$ 2.7 billion (World Fish Centre, 2005).

The contribution of inland fisheries to Nigeria's economy over the years cannot be overemphasized. This can be assessed by certain performance indicators at both micro and macro levels, such as GDP, employment, balance of trade/ payment, food supply and income. According to Olayide *et al.* (1973) fish supply constitutes over 40% of human protein intake in Nigeria, and recent studies shows that fish contributes 36.6gm per day of net protein utilization in Nigerian homes.

In terms of employment, fisheries create jobs and serves as sources of income to many families particularly in rural communities (Solarin, 1992). Ayeni (1993) estimated that about 5 million Nigerians may be involved in the fisheries industry, including other supportive sectors such as processing, marketing, transporting, gear / craft building, loading, etc.

In terms of GDP, though the contribution of fisheries compared to other sectors of the economy is quite paltry, it has the potentials to contribute significantly to the GDP if prioritized. The contribution of fisheries to GDP for selected years is shown below.

Challenges

Inland fisheries particularly river fisheries are vulnerable to changes in flooding regime, which leads to sharp variation in fish harvest at different seasons of the year and eventually leading to shortfall of income and poverty amongst the fisher folks.

Lack of Government commitment and poor funding posed a major problem to the development of fisheries particularly in the area of facilities, equipment and implementation of fisheries laws and regulations.

Water hyacinth and other invasive weeds such as Typha grass currently obstruct fishing activities, degrade water quality and hamper normal economic activities in river-rine areas such as Hadejia Nguru Gashua wetlands where the spread of the weeds has been established.

Post- harvest technology in fisheries sub-sector is generally poor and grossly inadequate. This leads to series of damage right from the shore, in addition to pests and diseases infestation, which incidence continues to reduce the gains from fisheries in almost all stages in the marketing chain.

Majority of the inland fishers are small scale, mostly without adequate capital to expand their production to take advantage of scale of production and profitable packages of technology to enhance their earnings.

Opportunities / Prospects of Inland Water Fisheries

The recent adoption of the Abuja Declaration on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture with focus on supporting capture fisheries, developing aquaculture, improving fish marketing chains, increasing benefits from fish trade and supporting decision makers with information (World Fish Centre, 2005), if properly and timely implemented, would go a long way in enhancing fisheries production in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In view of its immense contributions to poverty alleviation, food security and economic emancipation, greater attention needs to be given to freshwater fisheries, via a more holistic approach to water management and sustainability. Data on all aspects of fisheries need to be collected, documented and be made available to all stakeholders for possible intervention and interjection. The NEPAD Abuja declaration needs to be implemented and pursued judiciously, with close and participatory monitoring and evaluation. Infrastructure development needs to be enhanced across fishing communities, in Nigeria. This is to facilitate the smooth running of the production, processing and marketing activities in order to enhance their economic gains.

References:

- Ayeni, J.S.O. (1993). The Challenge of Conservation and Development of Nigeria Aquatic Resources (Keynote Address) Processing Resources Conservation Council Abuja. Pp 15.
- CBN (1994). Statistical Bulletin, Publication Central Bank of Nigeria Vol. 5 N0 1 June 1994 Pp 1 26.
- Dugan, P. (2002). Managing Water for Fisheries and Aquaculture. IWMI publications pp 49-56.
- Earth Trends (2003) Water Resources and Freshwater Ecosystem Nigeria. Earth Trends, Country Profiles Pp 1 4.
- Eyo, A. A. (2003). Food and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. Fish Network a Quarterly Publication of Fisheries Society of Nigeria (FISON). Vol. 10 N0 1 Sept. 2003 Pp 3.
- FAO (1998). Fisheries Statistic: Capture Production FAO year book Vol. 86 / 1 Pp 102 107.
- FDF (2002). Anonymous. Fisheries Policy in Nigeria. Federal Department of Fisheries Abuja Pp 1 20.
- Mapzones (2000). Nigerian Economy. Country's Profile on Net 8 pages.
- Olayide, S. O, Olatunbosun, O., Idusogie, E. O. and Abia-Gom Y.D. (1973). Aquaculture Analysis of Food requirements, Supply and Demand in Nigeria 1968 1985. Federal Department of Agriculture Lagos Pp 113.
- Oseni, T. (2003). The Nigerian Economic and Potentials for Growth and investment, Paper presented to the Association of Nigerians in the Capital District (New York, 2003) Pp 2.
- Solarin, B. B. (1992). Aspects of the Fishing Industry: An Overview of Artisanal Reefs and Fish Aggregating Devices for Increasing Fisheries Output and Viability in Nigeria. Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference FISON 1992.
- Stock, R. (2005). Nigeria: Nigerian Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2005 Pp 1 6 ,
- The Nigerian Embassy Moscow (2002). Nigeria: Economy. Navigator site Embassy Consular Affairs Business Forum Nigeria Public Forum Links Pp 1-8
- World Fish Centre (2005). African Governments Unanimously Adopt Abuja Declaration on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture. World Fish Centre public release date 25 August. Pp 15 24.